

The ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia in Sicily and Its Transmission during the Renaissance

1. - Abraham Abulafia (1240-c. 1292) is the founder of the ecstatic trend of Kabbalah¹. Born in Saragozza in Aragon he was educated by his father Shmuel, in Tudela, until the latter's death in 1258.

In 1260 he left Catalunya for the Land of Israel, where he was looking for the mythical river Sambatyon. In the middle of the sixties he studied Jewish philosophy, especially Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon's (Maimonides') *Guide of the Perplexed* in Capua. At the end of the sixties he arrived to Barcelona and in 1270 he started to study Kabbalah there and received a revelation. In the middle of the seventies he was teaching his Kabbalah and his special mystical, understanding of Maimonides' *Guide*, to some kabbalists in Castile. Then, he left Spain and attempted to teach his special type of mysticism in Greece, in Patros, Thebes and Euthrypo. In 1279 he returned to Italy and, after a period of detention in Trani, he spent some months again in Capua, where he taught his Kabbalah to four students. In 1280, he made an effort to meet the Pope, Nicholas III, who avoided such an encounter. When the Pope was in a retreat in the castle of Soriano, near to Rome, Abulafia made an attempt to meet him. However, when Abulafia arrived at the castle, the Pope suddenly died due to an apoplexy. Abulafia was imprisoned for two weeks by the Minorites, the little Franciscan brothers in Rome². In 1282 he was already in Sicily and I assume that he arrived there immediately after his release from prison in 1280.

¹ On this important Jewish Kabbalist see G. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1967, pp. 119-155, and the studies referred to in footnotes 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 26, 36.

² M. IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia and the Pope. The Meaning and the Metamorphosis of an Abortious Attempt* in «Association of Jewish Studies Review», (1982-1983), 7-8, pp. 1-17 [Hebrew]

Even before his arrival to Sicily, Abulafia had already written several books in which he described in some detail his peculiar type of Kabbalah, which consists of a variety of techniques aimed at reaching an ecstatic experience³. This experience was understood by him as 'prophecy'. His first writings reach back to the early seventies, but it seems that at the end of this decade his literary and propagandistic activities have been dramatically intensified. During the year 1280 alone he composed two of his most important books: a commentary on *The Guide* named *Sitrei Torah*, written while he was in Capua, and an important and most influential mystical handbook, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, written in Rome. Between 1279 and 1283 he also wrote several 'prophetic' writings, some of them in Messina, which, unfortunately, were lost⁴. Abulafia's own commentary on these works, written in Messina, has, however, survived⁵. It is mainly from these commentaries on the prophetic books, that we learn about Abulafia's prophetic claims, as well as of some Messianic aspirations. These aspirations, which stem from a revelation he had in Barcelona in 1270, prompted him to attempt to seek audience with the Pope. It seems that even before the effort to discuss these matters with the High See, in 1280, some Jews were afraid of the negative consequences of such an audacious enterprise, so fraught with Messianic overtones. Consequently, they distanced themselves from Abulafia and apparently some Jews even persecuted him⁶.

An errant teacher of Maimonide's *Guide of the Perplexed*⁷, a mystic, a prophet, a Messiah, a preacher of a new Kabbalah to both Jews and Christians, a prolific writer — this is Abraham Abulafia at the time of this arrival to Messina, apparently at the end of the year 1280. In Sicily he was destined to spend more than a decade — in fact the whole rest of his life — and to continue to act in the same ways he had done previously. It is in Sicily that he will write more than two thirds of his extensive writings and it is there that he had completed a rich literary career that will contribute substantially

³ For a description of these techniques see M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany, SUNY Press 1987.

⁴ See a bibliographical description of these lost writings in M. IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrines* (Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976) pp. 11-15. [Hebrew]

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ See *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 164b as well as fragment from the commentary on *Sefer ha-'Eduh*, printed by Henrich Graetz, «Abraham Abulafia, der Pseudomessias» *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*. vol. 36 [1887] p. 558.

⁷ On this issue see M. IDEL, *Maimonides and Kabbalah*, in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. TWERSKY, Cambridge 1990, pp. 58-62.

to both the Jewish and the Christian cultures. I shall avoid here discussion of the content of Abulafia's ecstatic writings⁸. Instead I shall focus my attention and two major topics: Abulafia's students in Messina and Palermo, and the reverberations of Abulafia's writings during the Renaissance. I hope that the first topic will be a modest contribution to a better understanding of the literature and history of Jews in Sicily in the decade that Abulafia lived there. I wish to emphasize here issues such as names, family relations and different attitudes toward Abulafia, as these materialize from the evidence that is extant in Abulafia's manuscripts, which have not been inspected by historians. I must underscore the fact that Abulafia's Kabbalistic writings are the most voluminous literary *corpus* ever written by a Jew in Sicily in general, and, as we shall see below, the most influential one as well. This *corpus* contains almost two thousand pages and it is, almost in its entirety, is still unedited, and extant only in manuscript form.

Abulafia was already in Messina in 1282, as we learn from the fact that he mentioned a number of his students who lived in this city in his commentary on *Sefer Ish 'Adam*⁹, namely: Rabbi Natronay, Rabbi Abraham ben Shalom, Rabbi Nathan ben Sa'adia Hadad, Rabbi Sa'adia ben Izhaq Sigilmasi and Rabbi Jacob ben Abraham. As we shall see below, his students — with the sole exception of the mysterious Rabbi Natronay — came to him one after another, apparently attracted by what they had heard from their acquaintances. Provided that Abulafia's testimony that his students approached him one after the other is correct, we may infer that in 1282 he had already been in Messina for a substantial period of time. Between 1282 and 1284 it seems that two processes took place: two more students from Messina joined his study group and, after a while, the majority of his students left him. This we learn from a very important autobiographical passage which will be adduced and analyzed here in some detail. In his *Sefer 'Ozar 'Eden Ganuz*, his most voluminous book, composed in Messina in 1285, he declares that:

«Indeed, in this town that I am within now, called Senim¹⁰, which [actually is] Messina, I have found six persons, and with me I brought the seventh, from whom they [the six] have learned in my presence, for a very short while. Each of them has received something from me, more or less, and all of them have left me, except the one, who is the first and [he is also] the first reason for what each and every one

⁸ For a general portrait of this mystic see M. IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia, un kabbaliste mystique*, in «La vie spirituelle» (1988), 68, pp. 381-392.

⁹ Ms. Roma-Angelica 38, fol. 3a.

¹⁰ This is a play on the Hebrew consonants of Messina.

of his friends had learned from my mouth. His name is Rabbi Sa'adiah ben Rabbi Izhaq Sigilmasi, blessed be his memory. He was followed by Rabbi Abraham ben Rabbi Shalom, and was followed [in turn] by Rabbi Jacob, his son, and latter was followed by Rabbi Izhaq his friend, and he was followed by the friend of this friend... and the name of the seventh was Rabbi Natronay Tzarfati, blessed be his memory»¹¹.

Therefore, one more person had been added to the earlier list but, at the same time, one of the important figures in Abulafia's group, died: Rabbi Natronay Tzarfati. However when Abulafia wrote the passage just cited, that is, in 1286, the situation as described in it had changed drastically. Of the seven disciples only one remained with the master: Rabbi Sa'adia Sigilmasi, to whom the book is dedicated. Immediately after the aforementioned passage, Abulafia indicated that:

«At the beginning of the year 5046¹², God has desired me, and He brought me in His holy palace, at the very time when I have completed this book, which I have composed here in Messina, for the dear, honorable, pleasant, intelligent and wise student, who desires to know the essence of the perfect Torah, Rabbi Sa'adiah, whom I mentioned above. Him I have seen as adhering to me in love; for him [I wrote this book] in order that he will have it in his hands, as a memory of what he has studied with me, for oblivion is common. Likewise, while it will be in his hands, I know that it will be of benefit also to his friends, who were mentioned above, an intellectual benefit to them as well as to others like them, by most of the things written in it»¹³.

Rabbi Sa'adiah is, then, the student to whom Abulafia dedicated his most comprehensive work. The very positive description of this student has something to do with the fact that he alone was not deterred by some events that had caused his friends to leave Abulafia. Immediately after the passage just quoted Abulafia writes:

«I know that unless those instance [related] to the phantasies which I have seen in my first visions, which have, God be praised, already passed, those abovementioned students would not separate from me. But those phantasies, which were the reasons for their departure and distancing from me, are the very divine reasons which have caused me to stand as I am and withstand the ordeals»¹⁴

¹¹ Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 165b.

¹² Namely sometimes in the fall of 1285.

¹³ Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 166a.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*. Mire on his phantasies visions see M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience... cit.*, pp. 144-145.

Abulafia is rather sensitive to the desertion of his students. He stoically accepts their temporary disengagement, but assumes that his devoted follower, Rabbi Sa'adiah, will impart to them the content of the book he, Abulafia, wrote. This patient attitude was nourished by his understanding that a certain event may appear in a different light to a person who experiences it internally, than it appears to others. I assume that Abulafia is referring to the consequences of his revelations: while he was encouraged by them, the students were apparently frightened. This calm attitude toward the departure of his students apparently had a positive repercussion: three years later, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Bible*, Abulafia mentions again Rabbi Abraham ben Shalom and Rabbi Nathan ben Sa'adiah, together with Rabbi Sa'adiah Sigilmasi, as being among those who accept his leadership¹⁵. Moreover, he dedicated one of his most important books, *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, to Rabbi Abraham and to Rabbi Nathan the Wise¹⁶.

In the same year, namely 1289, Abulafia dedicated another one of his books, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, to a certain Rabbi Jacob ben Abraham. It follows, therefore, that Abulafia had been able to reestablish good relations with at least three of his students. Moreover, in 1287, we learn of another student who is not mentioned up to that point nor at any time afterwards. I am referring to Rabbi Shlomo ben Moshe ha-Kohen from the Galilee. To him Abulafia dedicated his book *Shomer Mitwah*¹⁷. We may, therefore, conclude that after a certain crisis, apparently provoked by strange events connected to his ecstatic experiences, Abulafia was able to attract again some of his former students. It seems that all of them were living in Messina, and the fact that he dedicated almost all of the books he wrote in Sicily to these students, indicated that he spent most of the period between 1280-1291 in Messina.

Nonetheless, it seems that he also established some sort of relationship with some of the Jewish inhabitants of Palermo. In 1289 he mentions the names of Rabbi Ahituv ben Izhaq and Rabbi David his brother, Rabbi Shlomo ben Rabbi David, and Rabbi Shlomo he-Hazan ben Rabbi Yakhin¹⁸. With the exception of Rabbi Shlomo be-Hazan, all the people of Palermo are described as being physicians: *Rofe'*. According to the same testimony, these

¹⁵ Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fol. 1a, printed in M. IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia's Works...* cit., p. 20.

¹⁶ On the possible relationship between the name of this student of Abulafia and Lessing's Nathan the Wise, I hope to elaborate elsewhere.

¹⁷ See below note 26.

¹⁸ Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fol. 1a, printed in M. IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia's Works...* cit., p. 20.

people, like his students in Messina, are described as following his guidance. Let me compare Abulafia's relationship to his Messina-based disciples to his attitude toward the «physicians» of Palermo. The latter are mentioned for the first time only very late during Abulafia's stay in Sicily, probably as late as 1288. Consequently, it is only after approximately eight years of living in Sicily that Abulafia speaks of himself in connection with someone living in Palermo, while he repeatedly mentions students in Messina. Even in the year he mentions the students in Palermo, he dedicates one book to two of his Messina students. However, no book of Abulafia was ever dedicated, as far as we know, to a disciple from Palermo. This situation seems rather strange, since all those described as his Palermo students were part of the Jewish upper class, while none of his Messina students was a physician or even described as playing any role in the Jewish community. This imbalance in the politics of book-dedication reflects, in my opinion, Abulafia's somewhat later acquaintance with the Palermo group. There may also, however, be another reason for this reticence.

Toward the end of his life, apparently in the last three years, Abulafia was involved in a bitter controversy with the greatest authority on Jewish religious law of Aragonese Jewry, Rabbi Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret of Barcelona. This neglected controversy was apparently precipitated by a fierce assault on Abulafia's messianic and prophetic claims, mounted by ibn Adret in an epistle he sent to a number of people in Palermo¹⁹. Though there are good reasons to assume that ibn Adret had later written to Messina as well²⁰, it seems that his decision to open his attack on Abulafia with a letter to Palermo, may be an indication of Abulafia's weaker influence in that city. In any case, it seems that the existence of such an influence is incontrovertible. This may be learned both from Abulafia's own testimony, and from that of ibn Adret who indicates that Abulafia had a very dangerous impact on several communities in Sicily²¹. This impact is to be sought on two different levels: Abulafia was a propagandist of his peculiar type of ecstatic Kabbalah, but also of his claim of being a prophet and Messiah. It seems that it was the latter claim that provoked ibn Adret's fiery response. If further documents

¹⁹ *Ve-zot li-Yibudah*, printed by A. JELLINEK, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes Heft (Leipzig 1853) p. 19.

²⁰ In his *Responsum*, I, 548, printed now in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. H.Z. DIMITROWSKY, Jerusalem 1990, I, p. 101. He mentions his writings and those of the holy communities in Sicily. The use of the plural shows that it was not only to Palermo that ibn Adret wrote in this context.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

will reveal more substantial evidence for Abulafia's influence as Messiah, this might provide a better framework for the other messianic documents which originated in Sicily.

Before embarking on the second topic of our discussion, let me emphasize a particular trait of Abulafia's group of disciples in Messina, which in fact, is characteristic of the Jewish culture in Sicily in general. Abulafia, who was himself an Aragonese Jew, apparently brought with him a French disciple — Rabbi Natronay. In Messina, his most devoted follower was Rabbi Sa'adiah Sigilmasi, a North-African Jew. For a while Abulafia also had a student from the Galilee²², while Rabbi Abraham ben Shalom was originally from Comti, a small island not far away from Sicily. This collection of individuals testifies to the variety of Abulafia's group; a veritable international school on Jewish mysticism, and perhaps the first one. Abulafia's presence in Sicily transformed the island into more than just the outstanding place for studying ecstatic Kabbalah. Abulafia sent at least two of his Kabbalistic writings from Sicily to Spain; one letter to ibn Adret's colleague in Barcelona, Rabbi Yehudah Salmon²³, and *Sefer ha-'Ot*²⁴; an epistle to a certain Rabbi Abraham who was living off the island, apparently in Comti, the island Abulafia spent some time there²⁵, and one of his books, *Sefer Shomer Mitzvah*, was dedicated to Rabbi Shlomo ha-Kohen, who took it with him when he left the island²⁶. Sicily, thus became a center for the dissemination of a certain, rather unique type of Kabbalah.

2. - The fact that Abulafia dedicated most of his books to Sicilian Jews may account for the preservation of many of these books — some, like *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, in quite many manuscripts. Whether Abulafia was able to establish a school which continued the study of his particular kind of Kabbalah, is a question which cannot be conclusively answered. What is more important is that some of his writings were available at the end of the 15th century, and were interesting enough to attract the attention of several authors who were instrumental in the emergence of Christian Kabbalah. It seems that the role of Sicily in the transmission of Abulafia's Kabbalah may be greater than

²² See note 26 below.

²³ See *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik...* cit., pp. 13-28.

²⁴ *Sefer ha-'Ot*, printed by A. JELLINEK, in *Jubelschrift zum 70. Geburtstag des Prof. H. Graetz*, Breslau 1887, p. 85.

²⁵ *Sheva' Netivot Ha-Torah*, printed by A. JELLINEK, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, Erstes Heft, [Leipzig 1854], pp. 1-24.

²⁶ See M. IDEL, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany, Suny Press, 1988, pp. 91-92.

that of a mere repository of Kabbalistic manuscripts. A convert to Christianity, Paulus de Heredia, who came from Spain to Sicily, quotes Abulafia explicitly, a fact that cannot be explained by his knowledge of Kabbalah in Spain²⁷.

More importantly, the translator of Abulafia's most important book into Latin was a Sicilian Jew, Nissim Abu Faraj, who converted to Christianity and took the name Guiglemo Raymund Moncada, *alias* Flavius Mithridates. It was Mithridates who, more than any other person, contributed to ensuring an encounter between Christian intellectuals of the Renaissance — chief among them Giovanni Pico della Mirandola — and the Kabbalah. After his conversion, Mithridates translated a long series of Kabbalistic treatises from Hebrew into Latin, and sold them to the young count of Mirandola. It was from these translations, which were, as prof. Hayyim Wirszubski conclusively demonstrated, sometimes biased by Christian and magical additions to the Hebrew original, that Pico learned almost everything he knew about Kabbalah. Two points seem pertinent for our present discussion: the great amount of Abulafian material in the general economy of Mithridates' translations, and, the high quality of those Latin translations. From the quantitative point of view, the ecstatic Kabbalah is very well represented: three of Abulafia's books were translated as well as two of his commentaries on *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which were written in Spain and in Rome, and an important epistle addressed to Rabbi Yehudah Salmon and sent from Messina to Barcelona²⁸. The first commentary on *The Guide*, entitled *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah* or *Liber Redemptionis*, has survived almost solely in its Latin translation, as prof. Wirszubski has shown²⁹. This fact, along with other corroborating evidence³⁰, indicates that during the Renaissance people interested in

²⁷ F. SECRET, *L'Ensis Pauli de Paulus de Heredia* in «Sefarad», (1966), 26, pp. 79-102, 254-271, especially p. 100.

²⁸ See above note 19.

²⁹ C. WIRSZUBSKI, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988. List of sources, p. 286. On this important figure see also C. WIRSZUBSKI, *Flavius Mithridates. Sermo de Pasione Domini*, Jerusalem, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1963; S. SIMONSOHN, *Some Well-known Jewish Converts During the Renaissance*, in «Revue des études juives», CXLVIII (1989), pp. 20-26. Mithridates, born as a Jew in Grigenti, was, after his conversion but before his arrival to Northern Italy and his Latin translation, and inhabitant of Messina.

³⁰ I have found fragments from Abulafian texts, otherwise unknown, in the Giustini's *Polyglota on the Psalms*, printed in Genova, 1516, and I hope to analyse them elsewhere.

Kabbalah had at their disposal ecstatic material that is not available today. Mithridates also translated material written by Abulafia's followers such as the anonymous *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* or *Liber Combinationis*³¹. These four treatises testify to the very profound impact Abulafia's Kabbalah had in Italy in general. In other words, of the hundreds of Kabbalistic books written by Jewish medieval mystics, Abulafia's writings play a very dominant role in the *corpus* translated by Mithridates. We may even affirm that the ecstatic Kabbalah, almost totally ignored in Spain, was dominant in Italy. This predilection for ecstatic Kabbalah, reflected in Mithridates's translation, is also visible among two of his Jewish contemporaries in Italy: Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno, one of Pico della Mirandola's teachers in Jewish matters³², and in a work of Rabbi Asher Lemlein of northern Italy.³³ It seems, that at least from a quantitative point of view, the ecstatic Kabbalah which is presented in Abulafia's writings, remained very significant long after Abulafia's death in the writings of many Jewish and Christian authors in the Peninsula.

But it is the qualitative aspect of the acquaintance of these thinkers with Abulafia's thought that is most significant. Any superficial inspection of his writings demonstrates that they are written in a very difficult jargon, replete with obscure allusions and numerical equivalences, that is *gematria*. There can be no doubt that these writings are among the most difficult in Jewish thought in general, and in Kabbalistic literature in particular. An analysis of the way Mithridates translated these writings, done by Wirszubski, shows that the translator had an excellent understanding of this very complicated type of Kabbalah. We may, therefore, assume, that Mithridates did not pick up the relatively great amount of ecstatic writings, somewhere in Italy, solely for the purpose of translation; he was well versed in this kind of mystical literature, which constituted a very significant part of his Kabbalistic education. Indeed, it is quite possible that Mithridates was acquainted with Abulafia's writings not only as part of his attempt to sell Kabbalah to the Florentine intellectuals, but also as part of his earlier studies in Sicily while he was still a Jew. In any case, in one of his glossa he indicates that Abulafia performed miracles in Palermo³⁴. Since this view cannot be traced to any written source

³¹ C. WIRSZUBSKI, *Pico della Mirandola's...* cit., pp. 233-234.

³² See M. IDEL, *The Study Program of Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno* in «Tarbitz», (1979) 48, p. 310 [Hebrew].

³³ See E. KUPFER, *The Visions of the Rabbi Asher ben Rav Meir also Called Lemlin Reutlingen*, in «Qovetz 'Al Yad», (1976) 8, p. 412 [Hebrew].

³⁴ This I learned from an oral communication of Wirszubski, which mentioned to me the existence of a randnote in a Latin manuscript.

available, and it does not fit with Abulafia's contemptuous attitude toward magic, I assume that this remark is part of an oral tradition.

Another question that should be addressed is why those ecstatic writings, which were composed in the 13th century, were relevant for the 15th century Christian intellectuals like Pico della Mirandola. The answer is a complex one, since it involves the processes of intellectual opening which occurred in Christian circles. Nonetheless, one of the main reasons for the profound interest in Abulafia's particular type of Kabbalah, has to do with the fact that this mystical literature is replete with hermeneutical discussions on the one hand and philosophical terminology on the other. Abulafia's mystical interpretation of the masterpiece of medieval Jewish philosophy, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, is quite in the vein of the mystical-philosophical synthesis characteristic of the Florentine Renaissance. No less important are Abulafia's strong exegetical proclivities, and his tendency to expose, time and again, hermeneutical devices that are crucial in his Kabbalah: *gematria*, *temurah* and *noteriqon*. Pico della Mirandola and his later followers were, to a great extent, concerned with appropriating Jewish Kabbalistic exegesis in order to apply it to the Holy Scriptures. Their goals were to extract, by the most sacrosanct Jewish exegetical devices, Christian tenets from Jewish texts. Thus, Abulafia's very flexible hermeneutical approach was welcomed by Pico and other Christian Kabbalists. This flexibility was indeed already utilized by some of Abulafia's contemporaries, as he himself testifies³⁵.

In the 16th century, an interest in Abulafia's thought is evident in the translations undertaken for Egidio da Viterbo, who studied an Italian translation of Abulafia's important book *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*³⁶, as well as in Francesco Giorgio's *De harmonia mundi*. Abulafia's influence on Italian culture is evident even centuries after Christian Kabbalists ceased studying his writings. I am referring to the last major contribution of Abulafia to be found in a book of an Italian author — Umberto Eco's *Foucault's pendulum*. In this novel, Abulafia is not only mentioned explicitly, but his hermeneutical theory is well represented throughout the entire novel³⁷.

³⁵ See M. IDEL, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1989, ch. III.

³⁶ See M. IDEL, *Egidio da Viterbo and the Writings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia*, II (1981) 1-2, pp. 48-50 [Hebrew].

³⁷ See now U. ECO, *Forma locutionis*, in *Filosofia '91*, a cura di G. VATTIMO, Bari, Laterza, 1992, pp. 176-183, where he proposes to see in Abraham Abulafia's view of language a possible source of Dante's.

These are only a few of the striking examples of the impact made by Abulafia's writings since the Renaissance. Much more can be done in order to illuminate what I consider to be the most exciting contribution made by a Jew, living for a considerable period of time in Sicily, to both the Jewish and the general culture.